

LANDOWNER-LESSEE/SPORTSMAN RELATIONS COMMITTEE

Minutes of Regular Meeting Wednesday, August 6, 2003 Loews Ventana Canyon Resort- Tucson

Committee Members Present

Shelby Bennett, Livestock Grower
Sue Chilton, Arizona Game and Fish Commission
Sanford Cohen, OHV-Sportsmen Group
Darcy Ely, Livestock Grower
John P. King, Livestock Grower
George McKay, Coronado National Forest
Jerry Reid, Sportsmen Group
Richard Rico, Special Services Assistant Director, AGFD
Phil Smith, Sportsmen Group
Stephen Williams, Arizona State Land Department

Committee Members Absent

Ron Eichelberger, Sportsmen Group
Jon Fugate, Sportsmen Group
Steve Gobat, Bureau of Land Management
Hubby Grounds, Livestock Grower
Ron Searle, Livestock Grower

Others Present

Fred Bloom, Development Branch Chief, AGFD
Josh Avey, Landowner Relations Program Manager, AGFD
Troy Christensen, Landowner Relations Program, AGFD
Sal Palazzolo, Landowner Relations Program, AGFD
Matt Walton, Landowner Relations Program, AGFD
Jared Merkel, Intern, Landowner Relations Program, AGFD
Joe Underwood, Sportsmen Group
Jim O'Haco, Livestock Grower
Bud Bristow, Sportsman

Meeting Notes

The Landowner-Lessee/ Sportsman Relations Committee (Committee) meeting was called to order at 2:10 p.m. Chairman Sanford Cohen initiated an introduction of those present.

New Members/Presentations

Fred Bloom gave the Committee some background information on Phil Smith, who filled a vacant sportsman position on the Committee. Mr. Bloom presented a certificate of appreciation to Mr. Smith to recognize his achievement in being chosen by the Arizona Game and Fish Commission to serve on the Committee.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The Committee accepted the meeting minutes for January 18, 2003. John King wanted to have it noted that the efforts on the King's Anvil Ranch to install a fountain so U.D.A.'s could take water, without damaging pipelines and floats, were unsuccessful.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Chilton complimented the Landowner Relations Program (LRP) and the various volunteer groups for their wonderful efforts with cleanups and other Adopt-a-Ranch type projects. She said that anything we can do to improve the image of the Game and Fish Department in the eyes of the rural public would help increase public access.

Updates/Current Issues

Josh Avey briefed the Committee on the accomplishments of the program since the January meeting. He introduced Matt Walton, who handles all facets of the Landowner Relations Program in the southeastern part of the state. He introduced Sal Palazzolo, who just came to the LRP from the Nebraska Parks and Wildlife Department and will now be handling stewardships and grants. He introduced Jared Merkel, our intern who has been focusing on renewing all the Landowner Respect Program signs in Region V. Mr. Avey elaborated on Commissioner Chilton's comments about the volunteer efforts; he stated that since our last meeting the LRP has completed 16 Adopt-A-Ranch projects with 355 volunteers donating over 3,000 hours. He gave the Committee an update on the pilot project of providing dumpsters to ranches; the project has been largely unsuccessful because landowners/lessees don't want to take a chance of establishing a dumping area. He talked about Stewardship Program successes and efforts towards creating our first perpetual easements. Mr. Avey informed the Committee about two cooperative agreements – the Middle Gila Conservation Partnership and Desert Wells Multi-Use Area. The Desert Wells Multi-Use Area involves a joint effort between the State Land Department, Pinal and Maricopa Counties, landowner/lessees, OHV users groups, and the Game and Fish to establish a proactive OHV management area near Florence. The LRP has dedicated a significant amount of funding for signs, gates, and brochures. The signed Memorandum of Understanding will go to the Game and Fish Commission in September for approval.

Shelby Bennett had a question about some grazing allotment signs, which one of the landowners had requested from the ACGA for use at Desert Wells Multi-Use Area. Mr. Avey said that we would be happy to work with the ACGA if they wanted to purchase signs through our sign manufacturers on state contract. Mr. Bennett thought that this cooperative agreement was a good thing, but he felt that it would have been good if it had come before the Committee earlier for input.

Josh Avey and Richard Rico gave some information on a new source of funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service called the Landowner Incentive Program (LIP). They stated that the Department submitted a well-prepared proposal and is one of only six or seven states that received the total amount of available funds. The Department received 1.74 million dollars to use in the next three years for stewardship projects on private property, which will benefit "at risk" species and

potential habitats. The long list of eligible species will be available on the Department's web site. Three new positions will be created to oversee these projects.

Richard Rico said that LIP and our other funding sources would help us to become a full-service landowner relations program. Many ranches don't need the traditional gates and cattle guards as much as they need water developments, etc. LIP will be an additional source of funding to help make those types of projects possible so that we may offer landowners more in trade for public access. Josh Avey said that we are currently trying to bring big game stewardship funds over to the LRP, which will give us yet another tool to make the program even more effective.

Richard Rico also commented that he felt that the LRP is stronger than ever before with dedicated personnel and good funding sources. He added that the Director of the Nebraska Parks and Wildlife sent a letter to our Director regarding Sal Palazzolo, which stated that the Department stole one of their best biologists.

Richard Rico wanted to make sure that everyone was aware of the newly created population management hunts. If landowners are experiencing problems with a species in an agricultural area, Wildlife Managers work with landowners to set up these special additional hunts. Hunters who apply are put into a pool. They then may get a call at anytime to come pick up a tag and hunt a certain population of animals. It is a fairly quick process and has already been used for some problem buffalo from Raymond Wildlife Area and two or three times for elk.

The Committee was informed that Duncan Blair, who received the Arizona Habitat Stewardship award in January, sold the Tres Alamos Ranch. So, it was determined not to submit him for the national award. Instead a nomination was prepared for the Babbitt Ranch. A request was made to extend the deadline for submitting nominations for this year's Arizona Habitat Stewardship award. It was agreed to extend the deadline until October 1, 2003. Sanford Cohen said that he had a few possible nominees in mind, but that he had forgot about it. He suggested that we do additional promptings for Committee members. Josh Avey added that Committee members could notify us at any time throughout the year instead of waiting until nominees are requested. Richard Rico suggested that we also solicit nominations from the Habitat Partnership Committee, NRCS, and any other organizations that could be interested.

Fred Bloom stated that he would like to see the Committee become more active throughout the year by having members keep in touch with us as issues come up, rather than waiting for our biannual meetings. That way the program could start tackling issues and problems sooner. He also said that we would become a more effective committee if we stuck to the original purpose of the LLSRC, which is to identify ideas to reduce and resolve conflicts between sportsmen and landowner, lessees.

Identification of Current Issues and Possible Solutions

Sanford Cohen informed the Committee of the BLM Resource Advisory Council's efforts to develop a program called Sustainable Working Landscapes. The Council is gathering input mostly in regard to rangeland health and grazing issues from a wide spectrum of sources. The goal of the council is to create new standards for grazing and resource protection. Mr. Cohen offered to send copies of what is done so far to any Committee member who wants one. Stephen Williams said that it was his understanding that this was part of a reworking of BLM regulations. He added that part of Sustainable Working Landscapes had to do with the commitment of a BLM lessee to involve his private lands in conservation easements in a way to achieve a certain level of permitting through BLM.

Sanford Cohen also informed the Committee of the upcoming Arizona OHV Leadership and Program Strategy Workshop. The National Off Highway Vehicle Conservation Council is trying to encourage and facilitate Arizona OHV users to develop a single statewide OHV association, which would improve efficiency in the communication of issues and the resolving of disputes with landowners.

Darcy Ely brought up the problem of rural communities not having an efficient system of receiving information on public meetings, etc. that involve them. She asked if the Committee had any ideas to improve communication. Josh Avey said that the LRP would be creating a collage of information on our programs to distribute to wildlife managers to educate them so they can inform people in their units. Commissioner Chilton suggested creating refrigerator magnets with important phone numbers for distribution at outreach events.

Commissioner Chilton brought up the issue of ranch water valves being broken by U.D.A.'s and water tanks then draining out onto the ground. John King gave additional insight into the situation from his experience on the King's Anvil Ranch. LRP staff can look into technology available for valves but people will probably find a way to circumvent whatever there is. Josh Avey suggested that we design a sign in Spanish to try to get the U.D.A.'s to cooperate since it is for their benefit.

Jerry Reid showed photos of two volunteer project success stories, which made the ranchers very appreciative. He also showed a sign which the LRP had made from an idea that he had proposed to address shooting too close to buildings. The sign was designed to correct a problem at the Redrock Feedlots and has been put to use at other locations as well.

Next Meeting

The Committee decided that the next meeting should be scheduled in conjunction with the January Arizona Game and Fish Commission meeting. The LLSRC meeting will be held at the Arizona Game and Fish Department offices at 2222 W. Greenway Road in Phoenix. The meeting is scheduled to begin Saturday, January 17, 2004, at 9:00 a.m.

Action Items:

1. Unit 36 Wildlife Manager, Chris Hiser, will help design signs to address U.D.A.'s use of ranch water. LRP will order and distribute them. (LRP Staff)
2. Meeting minutes distributed to all members. (LRP Staff)
3. Meet with NRCS on a method of distributing information to landowners. (LRP Staff)
4. Create outreach refrigerator magnets with pertinent contact information. (LRP Staff)
5. Nominations will be solicited for Habitat Stewardship award. (LRP Staff)